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AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE

Philomathesian Society

OF MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE,

AT THE

CELEBRATION OF THEIR ANNIVERSARY,

ON THE EVENING BEFORE

PUBLIC COMMENCEMENT,

AUGUST 16, 1808.

BY JOHN FROST, A. B.

——————— Philosophy, baptized
In the pure fountain of eternal love
Has eyes indeed. COWPER.

Published by request of the Society.

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AGREEABLE to your request, I present you a copy of my Oration. It was written under the disadvantages of ill health, and the fatigue of a large school; my only apology is your request, and a hope that it may be of some service to those who are commencing the studies of College.

Your most obedient,
humble servant,
JOHN FROST, JUNR.

RICHARD HALL, Junr.
JOSIAH PEET,
JONATHAN D. WINCHESTER, } *Committee.*

"Hæc esto societas, in qua omnia insunt, quæ putant homines exputenda, honestas, gloria, tranquilitas animi, atque jucunditas." Cic. de Amicitia.

AN

ORATION.

Mr. President, and
Gentlemen of the Society,

MY situation is responsible, my task important and delicate in the extreme. Whom am I called to address? Not implacable enemies, in whose eyes virtues become defects; not an ignorant multitude regardless of taste or sentiment; not dissipated youth, placed within the walls of College, because worse than useless at home; but a band of brethren, united for mutual improvement; gentlemen whose minds are improved by science; enterprising youth, who could not be content with the ordinary occupations of life, and whose ambition, I trust, is to be distinguished for erudition and usefulness. With these views, I proceed with solicitude, but relying on your ingenuousness, I do it with pleasure. In the selection of a subject, by imagination, I was conveyed to yonder seminary, and heard one say, "point out that course, which, if pursued, will conduct us to the temple of Fame, the fields of Usefulness, the regions of the Blessed." Another, "we are just entering the threshold of Life, embarking on an untried ocean, fraught with dangers in every direction, but on which man is destined to sail; direct us where we may ride in safety, and what port we may gain

where every rational desire will be gratified." Alas! Who has that length of experience, that extensive information, those comprehensive views of men and things which this subject merits.

LIKE you, I am just entering a world of wonders, and illy able to direct myself. Happy should I be, were I able to point out, with an unerring hand, the dangers you must shun; to paint, in glowing colors, the objects to be kept in view, and with irresistible eloquence to urge motives to the attainment of them. I hope, however, to mention some things which will be of service to you, in your future exertions, and, if so, my highest expectations will be realized.

THREE things deserve your consideration: What ought to be the ragulating motives of your actions; What is to be done by human means to promote the happiness of mankind, and what will most qualify you to contribute your share in effecting so valuable an object. In order to discover the ultimate object of your actions, suppose a person, without the aid of revelation, endeavoring to discover his duties as a moral agent. He would thus reason: What am I? A frail lump of animated clay, liable, by a thousand incidents, to be reduced to my original dust; yet something within proclaims my dignity, propels me to action, and gives me a rank superior to the objects with which I am surrounded. Whence came I? dependence, absolute dependence is the result of every reflection. From something external I must have received my existence: that something must have been independent of my own species; however far I trace back the descent, it is like passing from one link to another of a chain which is suspended; the farther I trace it the more absurd is the idea that it has nothing for its support: A being independent and eternal

must have given me existence, and from him must have proceeded whatever I behold. For what purpose has he placed me here? Man has intellectual faculties, which are improved by exercise; social virtues, which link him to his fellow man; speech, by which he can communicate his thoughts to others: These are evidences he was formed for society. What is the object to which my actions should center? Is it my own interest, or the interest of others? Has one man a right to pursue an object in opposition to the interest of society? then, all have the same right. This conclusion is manifestly false. The interest of the whole, should then be, the ultimate object of every member of community. Will my existence ever terminate? I see man rapidly passing through the different stages of life. At first he appears helpless, ignorant and unconscious of future ill: The bloom of youth soon succeeds, and the heart palpitates with joys prospective; he then passes the meridian of life, and again becomes helpless; his locks are silvered with age; his trembling limbs scarce sustain the ponderous load; pains and diseases assail him; the world ceases to captivate, and is cheerfully resigned for the lonely tomb. A dark impervious veil is here cast over human nature. Does he yet exist? If so, is he happy or miserable?——Alas! I am unable to decide. To suppose that virtue is not rewarded, that vice is not punished, is impeaching the wisdom of his Creator; yet he falls like the beast of the field, the flowers of the vale, to rise no more! Such would be the reflections of a mind, in the full exercise of reason, uncontaminated with vice; and to such an one, it would seem a revelation would not only be respectable, but would fill him with rapture, gratitude, and adoration.

We have a revelation which happily solves the difficulties stated, with many others, and unites with reason in declaring that the good of society, the glory of God, should be the object of all. But with how different a reception does it meet. Some, with cold indifference, read its heaven-descended doctrines, on which the eternal interests of man depend; others, immured in business, or the fancied pleasures of life, wholly disregard it; while some, alarmed at the awful denunciations of Divine vengeance against vice, which it contains, would fain invalidate its authenticity, and substitute a cobweb philosophy, more congenial to their feelings, and leave man to wander in darkness, without a guide to direct, a ray of hope to cheer; with this consolation only, that death will terminate every woe. Shall I suppose there is one of our number, who belongs to either of these classes? No,—I cannot—my feelings revolt at the thought: Let the volume of inspiration then be your guide and standard, which points out, as an ultimate object, the *happiness* of *man*, the *glory* of *God*.

Take a cursory view of the situation of the world, and you will see what exertions are necessary to effect so radical a change, that it might be denominated happy. Point out the society where no broils, no contentions exist; where the destructive breath of calumny has not blasted a fair character; where the calumniator, the bacchanal, the gamester, the corrupter of innocence cannot find an associate; but are viewed with an indignant eye, and treated with the contempt they merit. Point out the nation whose laws cannot show that crimes are committed, which infernal spirits, themselves, would not almost blush to perpetrate. Point out the government, in which

every person who holds, or wishes for an office, would take no measures to advance his own interest or aggrandizement, but such as he would justify in others. Point out that happy people, where pure religion, the gospel of Emanuel, warms every heart, fills every breast with that ardent desire for the happiness of others, which it feels for its own. When this can be done, let the man of benevolence sit down in dignified ease, contemplate the happiness of his fellow man, and say, my work is accomplished: But till then, let him rise in his might, resolve to encounter every hardship, and press forward with a perseverance which no obstacles can resist. Never was there a period, in which virtue, talents, and correct sentiments were more necessary than the present. We live in an age of miracles; in an age which teems with important events: what the issue will be, is impossible to predict. War, the scourge of mankind, the minister of vengeance, is permitted to rage, in all its horrors, and threatens destruction to every nation, that dares assert and maintain the rights of man. Europe is now shaken to its very centre, by a despot, the most tyrannical with which the earth was ever cursed. Thousands have fallen a sacrifice to gratify his insatiable ambition. In short, he seems determined to break through every barrier, however sacred, which lies in his way to universal domination. Infidelity has raised her head aloft, and bid defiance to the God of Heaven. Shame and Virtue, are strangers to her votaries; Audacity, Falsehood, and Disorganization are their companions. The seat of her Empire is in France; her subjects are dispersed throughout the nations of the earth, administering the fatal draught, which many are ready to swallow, as an antidote to every future evil. The

reign of Infidelity was established in the time of Lewis XIVth; how long it will continue, or how destructive its effects will be, is uncertain. Bayle, Fontenelle, Voltaire, and Montesquieu, are among her most distinguished champions.

VOLTAIRE says, "I am tired of hearing people repeat that twelve men have been sufficient to establish Christianity; and I will show that one is sufficient to overthrow it." During the revolution in France, a comedian publicly appeared, and thus attacked Almighty God: "No, thou dost not exist. If thou hast power over the thunderbolts, grasp them; aim them at the man who dares set thee at defiance in the face of thy altars. But no; I blaspheme thee, and I still live: no, thou dost not exist." Does Imperial France present a more pleasing aspect? Papacy is again the established religion of the nation. But this is no more than political artifice. The populace, notwithstanding all the ranting theories upon the perfectability of human nature, are still composed of too gross materials to be manageable without some restraint. Bonaparte, after his return from Egypt, had the audacity thus to proclaim his independence. "I swear, I swear, I swear—by myself." He now puts the consecrated cup of the holy sacrament to his lips; but what evidence does he exhibit, that his heart is warmed with love to mankind? It is an imposition on common sense, seriously, to ask the question.

INFIDELITY is not confined to France. It prevails in a greater or less degree throughout Christendom. England has produced a Collins and a Bollingbroke, and many are now the secret enemies of Christ. Infidels have become less bold, but they do not cease to act.

INFIDELITY comes clothed with the garb of philosophy; passions and sentiments the most dangerous, are disguised under the mask of virtues. In the language of a modern writer, "The poison has of late been served up, in every shape that is likely to allure or beguile the imagination in a false tale, a novel, a poem in philosophy, natural history, &c." Turn your attention to the Pagan world, and see how many of the human family yet remain, who cannot be called Christians.—Pagan superstition, and Mahometan delusion, are extensive. Asia and Africa are sunk to a state of degradation, which must cause the friend of humanity to weep. In justice to Christian worthies of the first centuries, and to obviate an objection often made, that few nations, comparatively, have heard of the gospel; it may not be improper to state, that during the first century, as is well known, the gospel was preached in many countries of Europe and Asia. In the 2d century, it was preached in all the countries east of Palestine, which were then known. In the 3d century, a tribe of Arabs were converted. In the 4th century, the gospel was sent into Ethiopia and Iberia. In the 7th century, the Nestorians sent the gospel into China;* and from recent accounts, it must have been introduced into India, at an early period. But, Oriental philosophy, and the religion of Mahomet, being better accommodated to the propensities of mankind, counteracted, in a great measure, the happy effects which the gospel was calculated to produce.

SEE the deluded Mussulman—He patiently endures the heat of a vertical sun, and the fatigue of extensive journies through deserts of burning

* *Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History.*

sand, to visit the birth-place of Mahomet; and by this pious act, believes his sensual heaven secured.

Look at the native of America—He leaves the world without reluctance, supported by the belief that the "country beyond the hills" abounds with game, where he shall have a perpetual feast. Such is the situation of mankind;—and are you not impatient to contribute your share to their relief? Consider then, what will best qualify you to aid in the accomplishment of an object so desirable.

Gentlemen, you are to move in an important sphere, in which success or failure will be attended with interesting consequences, which will not cease to operate, ages after your memories may be lost by the lapse of time. It then behoves you to take an extensive survey of the duties and difficulties of those stations you design to fill, and qualify yourselves to fill them honorably and usefully.

From you, more is expected than from most others; because few enjoy the same advantages. The situation of the world is such, that employments are various. Every man cannot guide the affairs of state, explore the regions of science, or publish the gospel of peace. The husbandman, the merchant, the mechanic, are as necessary as the officer of state, the orator of the bar, or the herald of the gospel. Every man has a different part to act, and should avail himself of those means which will prepare him to perform it in the best manner, while the ultimate object of all, should be the same.

During your collegiate life, you are laying the foundation, on which you are to build a superstructure. A defect here is rarely remedied. It

is said that indifferent scholars, after leaving College, frequently become distinguished for science and greatness. It sometimes is the case, but it is among the uncommon things which happen in our world.

ENDEAVOR to gain a *clear* and *correct knowledge* of the *elements* of the *sciences*. Such is the connection and dependence of one branch upon another, that a person will receive advantage from those branches of science, which, at first view, appear very remote from his employment. Many, in College too wise to be directed, and too ignorant to see this connection, neglect those branches as useless, from which they expect to receive no direct and immediate benefit. The Languages and the Mathematics are among this number.—Time will not permit me to mention their advantages, and those of many other branches; suffice it to say, many have neglected them, who afterwards have acknowledged their error with the deepest regret. I mention the fact, that you may avoid the error, and be guarded against the sophistry of those, who through self-conceit, ignorance, or envy, would dissuade others from a knowledge of those things of which they are ignorant.

AN *object* should be *aimed at*. It is no objection to it, that it is great. Place the person before you, who has shone with the greatest lustre in the profession you hope to follow, and resolve to become his equal. Study his character; learn his excellencies and his defects: imitate the former, and avoid the latter. A person, who has an important object to gain, will almost mechanically avoid those things which are incompatible with obtaining it. He will qualify himself to hold a superior rank, and will not permit time to pass unimproved; while he who has no object in view,

will conduct as though he had none. Few will hold responsible stations, but those who merit them, except in an age of political phrenzy, when virtue and talents yield to intrigue, chicanery, and self-importance.

A SPIRIT of *independence*, *energy*, and *perseverance* is another requisite to extensive improvement. Difficulties and discouragements attend the accomplishment of every thing valuable. The unstable, the timid, and the indolent may rest assured their advances will be small. Obstacles will become more formidable, as they advance.—Insects will grow into lions, motes will swell into mountains.

"THE wise and prudent conquer difficulties, by daring to attempt them. Sloth and Folly shiver and shrink at the sight of Toil and Danger, and make the impossibility they fear." The man of energy, proceeds with a firm, determined step. No dangers deter him, no obstacles are too great to encounter; opposition may, for a time, damp his ardor, and retard his progress, but he soon presses with redoubled vigor, and proceeds with renovated strength. He is like the full flowing stream, which while uninterrupted, rolls along its destined course, with a gentle uniform motion; but when obstructed, the fountain continually adds to its strength, till by accumulation, it breaks over every opposing mound, and pursues its wonted course.

MAINTAIN *consistency* of *character*, or in other words, *act agreeable* to your *sentiments*. In the fashionable world, you may sometimes be taxed with singularity; but by such a course, you will gain the approbation of the good and great, and at least command the respect of the vicious. No character is more contemptible, than he, who,

camelion like, is black, white, or grey, according to the cast of those with whom he meets. What use can such a character answer in society? He may be of similar use with the weathercock; one shows the current of the air, the other that of the times. Had Locke, Newton, or Luther, been of this description, what would they have effected in eradicating prejudices, in exposing the absurdity of long established principles? Their names would have been lost; not when Science and Virtue cease to charm, but would, deservedly, have been buried with their bodies.

CULTIVATE *genteel* and *obliging manners*.—They are not inconsistent with a character of the greatest dignity. The man of science and independence, is in danger of a failure in this respect. His attention is turned to objects, which in themselves, are of much greater magnitude; and seeing many possess them, who in other respects, are worthless characters, he may deem them unworthy his notice. But is it not true that such persons, if base, are by far more dangerous?—They often succeed in conciliating the affections of the virtuous, and alluring the unwary into improper courses. It becomes me to speak with deference of so venerable a character as that of a clergyman; but are there not some of this order, who, from an improper education, or some other cause, do, by their unpolished manners excite some small degree of disgust, and thereby render their public instructions less useful? The laws of religion and society are intimately blended, and it is matter of regret, that piety is so often unaccompanied with winning manners.

CULTIVATE a *classical taste*.—This is an acquisition important as it is difficult. You cannot bestow too much attention to make this a charac-

teristic of your compositions ; and without it, to persons of cultivated taste, they will be insipid. It is acquired by a thorough acquaintance with the ancient classics, and a frequent perusal of the most approved modern writers. Do we not find many writers who command our attention and admiration, by their oratory, genius, and classical elegance ? Some of them have advanced pernicious sentiments, but, notwithstanding, are read with delight ; and those who have no established sentiments, from an admiration of their writings, are in danger of embracing their sentiments. Shall I not be justified in saying, that the public discourses of many of our clergy are very deficient in classical elegance. I mention this, because many of you are preparing for the desk ; and it is highly important that those, who write on moral subjects ; who instruct those things which most intimately concern the happiness of man, should avail themselves of every thing which commands attention and respect.

STUDY *human nature*.—Man is an active being ; but set in motion by things external, and governed by certain laws. Whoever has discovered these laws, has found a secret, by which he can perform wonders. The orator knows its force, his audience have felt it. This knowledge is acquired from books ; from critical observations on different characters, and the same character in different situations, but more especially from the operations of one's own mind. Religion, is it necessary for me to add, is necessary to qualify you for society. As observed, the good of mankind ought to be the object of all.—The world is to be reformed, and through the instrumentality of human exertions. Religion is the most powerful means to effect it. How vain,

to expect this change from a dry philosophy, the experience of ages abundantly testifies. Ridiculous and absurd in the extreme, are the notions of visionary theorists, who would reform the world without the aid of religion. Should the world be reformed, I am of opinion it will be by an union of sentiment and object among men of influence, in different stations, which is strikingly the case in the exertions now making for the propagation of the gospel in Heathen nations. The legislator, the orator at the bar, the judge on the bench, might have a prodigious influence in discountenancing vice, and disseminating correct sentiments. To such, those in the humbler walks of life are prone to look for wisdom, and too liable to adopt their sentiments, however erroneous. The barrister, who would expose the deformity of Vice, and paint Virtue in her loveliness, must enforce the precepts of Christianity, and point beyond the veil where Virtue and Vice meet their due reward. The legislator, who would have his laws observed, must evince, by his conduct, that he obeys laws above the power of mortals to abrogate. How often do we see those who make laws against reigning vices, give the first example for their disobedience? When this is the case, it is not more than we may reasonably expect, that such crimes will abound. The legislator, under a solemn oath, enacts, that the Sabbath shall be observed. When that sacred day arrives, he rides a few miles for pleasure, recreation, or to view some reputed curiosities. His conduct speaks this language; either he is too vile to observe the wise regulations, or, that he deems such laws an imposition on society.

I HAVE endeavored to show what should be the ultimate object of your actions; taken an imperfect view of the world, that you might see the field which is open for your exertions; and mentioned some things which will prepare you for valuable members of society. May I not now say, with one before me, "you see your object on a towering height." Let nothing deter you from attaining it.

MANY of you are now waiting to receive the first honors of this institution. Permit me then to observe a few words to those on whom the interests of the society are to devolve. You are sensible, that the respectability and usefulness of any society depend, not on the number, but the character of its members. If all can gain admission to your society, its advantages are lost. In the admission of members, I have thought that, formerly, too little regard was paid to morals and scholarship. Avoid the error, and let him, known only for his ignorance or villany, never be found in your circle. Let the name of *Philomathesian* be synonimous with a distinguished scholar, a reputable character.

MR. PRESIDENT, *and Brethren of the Society*—Being about to leave this place, indulge me in bidding you an affectionate farewell. A wide world is before us, chequered with good and

ill. What our situation will be, is among the secrets of futurity. Some of you are looking to the law. The object is laudable; the profession important, and doubly so, because from it the most important offices in our general and state governments are filled. Go, plead the cause of innocence; vindicate the oppressed from the cruel hand of avarice; bring the villain to justice; and unite with the divine, in reclaiming the vicious, and applauding the good.

Some of you are preparing for the ministry. Pause—pause—pause!—A moral infatuation must have seized the man who dares proceed with precipitation. Whence is your commission? From Jehovah! What are you? frail, mortal, sinful. Strange it is, that a trust so sacred was committed to apostate creatures; but infinite wisdom hath done it; let man be silent. If you feel the awful responsibility of the charge, yet duty bids you go, let no discouragements deter you. He who has given commission, has likewise said, "Lo I am with you alway."—Instruct the ignorant; reclaim the wandering; comfort the desponding; encourage the fearful; convince the doubting; confound the Infidel; point the trembling sinner, smitten by the thunders of Sinai, to the cross which whispers pardon; and, with boldness mingled with pity, point the impenitent to the awful doom that awaits him unless reclaimed.—Your duties are arduous; your discouragements numerous.—The tongue of slander will assail you; the penurious may withhold the conveniencies of life; an ungrateful people may despise your instructions and bid you depart. But remember the Lord of glory, who descended on earth, was set at naught; was crucified with malefactors; his followers were imprisoned, were scourged; yet gloried that they were accounted worthy to suffer. He who has given you commission, will, at length appear, clothed with majesty and glory, when, if found faithful, he will receive you to himself.

We live in a world of changes, and friends must separate. But when time shall cease, man will still exist. Let us then live, not only worthy the name of Poilomathesians, but Immortals, that when the loud trump shall sound, to summon man to his Judge, we may meet where joys are unceasing; where friends are not seperated; where sorrow never comes.

FINIS.

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